

Columbia River Gillnetter

COLUMBIA RIVER FISHERMEN'S PROTECTIVE UNION

Spring 1995 / Vol. 26, No. 1



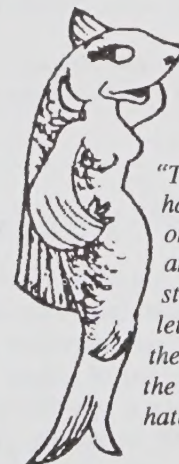
Salmon Recovery Plan: *It's turning into a three-ring circus*

The stage is set for the debate to save endangered Snake River salmon.

The Clinton administration has finally released the final pieces of its salmon recovery plan, yet no group seems particularly pleased with it. Four areas have been targeted for changes: hydroelectric dams, stream restoration and habitat, fish hatcheries and harvests.

The plan calls for less barging, more stream protection and the phasing out of lower river gillnet fishing, as well as commercial ocean trolling — even though the numbers show recreational fishermen catch more endangered salmon. They're talking buy-outs of boats and permits again.

Story begins on page 6



Sally the Salmon Says...

"These days it seems everyone has a plan to save me, but no one seems to agree on anything! Instead of more studies and comment periods, let's get it together now why there's still a chance, before the only fish left are hatchery fish."

On deck

- 6** *The long-awaited salmon recovery plan is finally released, but will it do any good?*
- 15** *Seals, sea lions & salmon: It's becoming a free lunch, but some are fighting back*

On the cover: Two classic Columbia River gillnetters waiting for the tide on the Vancouver drift in the 1960s. Certainly a sight one cannot see today!



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SECOND VICE PRESIDENT Chris Doumit
Post Office Box 342, Cathlamet, WA 98612

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY Jack Marincovich
Route 2, Box 67-A, Astoria, OR 97103 or
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FOREWORD

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NEW INITIATIVE: *It's not about conservation*

1995 A small group of sportfishers in the state of Washington have cooked up a new ballot initiative which would eliminate (and outlaw) lower river gillnetting — and any method of fishing that catches non-targeted species, such as steelhead and sturgeon, from harvestable stocks.

It's called Initiative 640, or "Save our sealife," and it arrives with a new twist that its many predecessors did not have: it appears this initiative has more to do with saving the aluminum industry than saving salmon.

Bruce Lovelin, executive director of the Columbia River Alliance, (a group of aluminum manufacturers, irrigators and other industrial water users who don't want to give up their water), recently weighed in with a hefty \$5,000 donation to support the cause.

With donations like this, the group has been able to hire a campaign specialist to handle the write-in procedures who pays petitioners one dollar for each signature they gather.

This initiative is not about conservation, it's about *money* and it's about *greed*. It's just another silly ploy to shift attention away from the real problems, like habitat destruction and, of course, those giant, fish-killing slabs of concrete the alliance doesn't want to talk about.

We'll give them their persistence, but the logic isn't there, and the fish aren't, either.

"We'll give them their persistence, but the logic isn't there, and the fish aren't, either."

On another note, this year's winter salmon season was the first in history where lower river gillnetters didn't put their nets in the water.

But at the Compact meeting in January, sports fishermen got a big surprise when gillnetters stood and said, "Sure, we'll stay on the beach, if it means helping save endangered salmon, and if *you* stay on the beach, too."

So the sports will have to settle for the Willamette — they'll have it to themselves all spring.

Everyone has a plan to save salmon, but in my opinion, there should be no fishing allowed at all on the river above Bonneville, and near spawning areas.

Cooling the water temperature behind dams is critical, and barging must stop — fish belong in the water, not in trucks and barges. Increasing water flow at peak migration times is also important.

The monetary incentive to rid the Columbia of predators of young salmon (like squawfish) must also increase.

But let's face it, if we really want to save salmon, dams need to change. In one fell swoop, the Grand Coulee wiped out more than 1000 miles of prime spawning grounds — 40 percent of the entire river system, so it seems to me improving fish passage at this dam might be a good place to start.

—Don Riswick

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FROM THE SECRETARY

The National Marine Fisheries salmon recovery plan was released March 20, and once again the plan has no balance to it.

Time and time again these plans are put out to the people to review. The information they use comes from people who are supposed to have a background in fisheries, but never do they ask someone who actually has "on-the-grounds" experience to take part in the decision making.

The plan calls for more river flow, (which is very important, as low river flow causes the river to get warmer every year), and control of logging practices and improved farming operations.

Then they get to the commercial fishermen, who have been protecting these fish runs for many years, by curtailing and eliminating some fishing seasons. They say this will phase out the fishery by 2002, but it's hard to see the balance in this type of plan.

Also, there is nothing in the plan about the problem of ever-increasing populations of marine mammals along our coastline and in our rivers. This might be the next serious problem, along with low river flows.

If this plan does go through, and enough money is there for a buy-back, it definitely should be done on a volunteer basis, not mandatory.

They need to understand that they are not just buying the opportunity to fish, but are buying out a way of life.

—Jack Marincovich



HEADING FOR THE FISHING GROUNDS — With Tongue Point as a backdrop, the editor's gillnetter idles toward the drift during a salmon season in the 1950s.

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NO SPRING CHINOOK: Compact closes sport and commercial seasons from Bonneville to the Pacific Ocean

In an unprecedented move, the Columbia River Compact has closed the lower Columbia River to all spring chinook salmon fishing this year, in response to an expected record low return of spring chinook to the river and its tributaries.

Once boasting the world's largest run of spring chinook, only about 12,000 are estimated to return to the Columbia this year, compared to runs of 100,000+ during the past decade. In 1994, the previous record low, just 19,000 upriver spring chinook made their way back.

Of the some 12,000 fish predicted to return this year, only about ten percent are expected to be wild Snake River spring chinook, protected under the Endangered Species Act.

"The Columbia was the greatest chinook salmon-producing river in the world, and the spring chinook were the dominant fish — so it shows you what we've come to," said Jim Martin, Oregon's chief of fisheries.

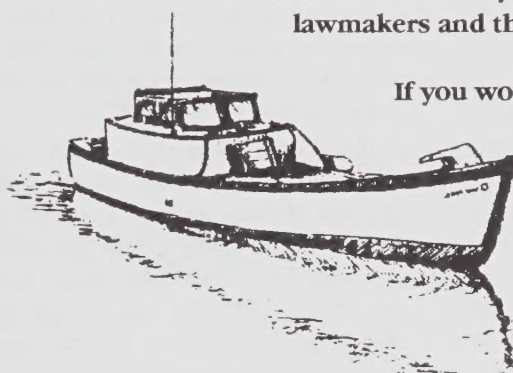
"Historically, it was a fabulous fishery in the spring. It will be extremely sad that it's closed, but we're staring extinction in the face," he said. "It feels terrible."

Continued on page 30

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The Columbia River Fishermen's Union would like to remind Lower Columbia commercial fishermen that we depend solely upon annual membership dues and individual donations to keep us afloat and in touch with the many important issues facing the commercial fishing industry today.

The *Columbia River Gillnetter* is the only remaining publication on the west coast devoted exclusively to gillnetting. We have been making a difference for more than 27 years, but our continued existence is threatened by increasing production and mailing costs. Now more than ever, we need a voice to represent our side of the issue, and the *Gillnetter* is our only contact with fishermen, lawmakers and the general public.



If you would like to help, send donations to CRFPU, 322 10th Street Astoria, OR 97103

Your help is greatly appreciated



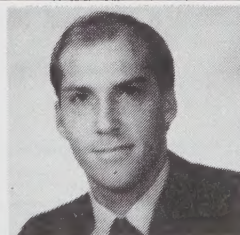
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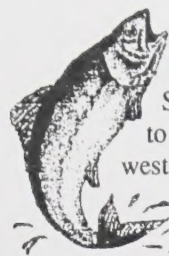
ART DIRECTOR Michael V. Demase

GRAPHICS/PRODUCTION Tom Wynn

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Articles, letters and photographs are welcome for submission.

SALMON RECOVERY PLAN: *It's a three-ring circus*



While the on-again, off-again Snake River salmon plan seems to be changing faster than Northwest weather, the Clinton administration has recently promised some \$90 to \$100 million of U.S. taxpayer's money will go toward offsetting the estimated increase of \$160 million the plan will impose.

The remaining \$60 million or so would be absorbed in the Bonneville Power Administration's budget, without any customer rate increases other than the 5 percent already announced by BPA.

"The administration has agreed it is unfair for the people from our part of the country to shoulder the entire cost of saving the salmon," says Sen. Max Baucus of Montana, who, along with Oregon Reps. Elizabeth Furse and Peter DeFazio, as well as Washington Rep. Norm Dicks and Sen. Patty Murray, pushed strongly for the federal aid package.

"Now we can focus on salmon recovery measures, without bankrupting the people of the Northwest," said Murray.

Meanwhile, the federal government's salmon plan, the most ambitious ever attempted under the Endangered Species Act, focuses on the "four H's": hydro-power, habitat, hatcheries and harvests.

But two key components of the plan, federal dam operations and habitat protections, have yet to be approved by a federal judge, who sent earlier proposals back to the drawing board.

HYDROPOWER: More water would be released in the spring to flush young salmon over dam turbines safely

"The fundamental touchstone here is that salmon do matter for the Northwest, and this recovery plan represents our commitment to restoring these important stocks. The salmon's decline tells us something is wrong here in the Northwest."

to the sea, rather than stockpiling the water for electrical power. Only about half of the young salmon will be barged downriver, compared to as much as 90 percent in recent years. The transportation program and barging practices will also be improved, so fewer fish are packed into each barge.

A seasonal drawdown of the John Day reservoir, which would also help the young salmon survive the trip downriver, is also part of the federal plan.

HABITAT: The plan would require 300-foot buffer zones along salmon streams during logging practices, and would further restrict such activities in the healthiest watersheds when salmon are present. Grazing and mining would also be restricted along salmon streams, while habitat restoration projects along damaged streams would get the go-ahead.

HATCHERIES: Hatchery releases would be capped at 1994 levels, and the interaction between wild and hatchery-reared fish would be minimized. Wild

salmon would also be captured and raised separately in hatcheries to supplement natural runs.

HARVESTS: The plan calls for a phase-out of the Lower Columbia River gillnet fishery, as well as commercial troll fisheries, with a possible buy-out of existing boats and permits. Indian tribes and Canadian fishermen would be encouraged to restrict their catch of Snake River chinook.

"The fundamental touchstone here is that salmon do matter, and this recovery plan represents our commitment to restoring these important stocks," said William Stelle, regional director of the National Marine Fisheries Service. "The salmon's decline tells us something is wrong here in the Northwest. They are the canaries in the mine."

The recovery plan now faces 90 days of public comment before a final version is adopted by the fisheries service. Public meetings are scheduled in Portland on Wednesday, May 31, and in Astoria on Thursday, June 1.

But even if the plan becomes reality, officials estimate it will take some 50 years before endangered Snake River salmon runs come back to health.

"There are many forces at play in the demise of salmon," says Stelle, "and anybody who says it's just the ocean, or just the dams, or just the barges doesn't know what they're talking about."

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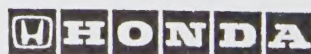
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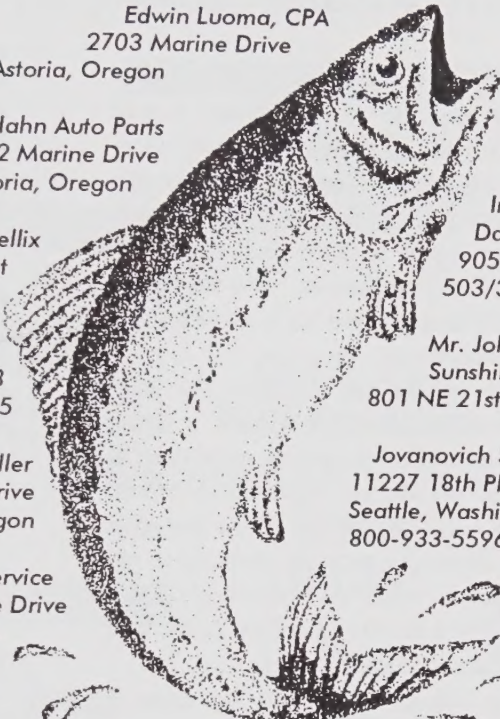
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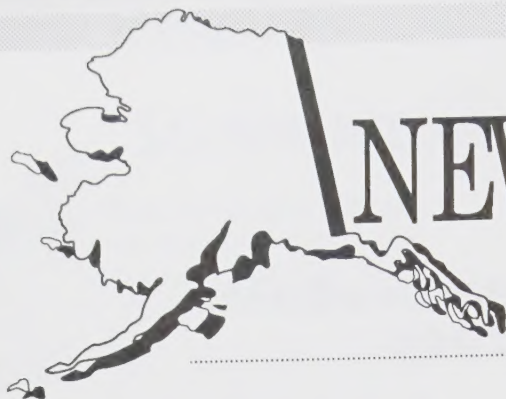
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NEWS from the NORTH

BRISTOL BAY: Things are looking up

FISHERMEN SHOULD EXPECT SORE HANDS AND A FAIR REWARD FOR THEIR EFFORTS

NAKNEK, Alaska — Bristol Bay gillnetters should be prepared to reel in plenty of wild red salmon this summer, as more than 57 million copies are expected to return here.

According to the Alaska Department of Fish & Game, 1995 is the peak year of a five-year cycle, and that means bay fishermen could surpass the record 40 million fish caught in 1993.

Last year, about 35 million reds were caught on the bay from a total run of about 46 million, significantly less than what was expected.

Fish prices look good for bay fishermen as well, as a strong worldwide demand for salmon has pushed prices up, and red salmon is the most valuable of the five Alaska species.

February wholesale red prices in Japan were 65 percent higher than at the same time last year, according to the University of Alaska Fairbanks' Salmon Market Information Service.

Higher prices paid to fishermen are the

result of the smaller-than-expected 1994 run, a weak harvest of Chilean farmed salmon and a solid demand from Japanese consumers. Canned salmon is also experiencing high demand.

"The rumor is prices will start at at least \$1, but who knows," said one fisherman. "It'll sure make for a whole lot better attitude."

Here are the fish numbers: The Naknek/Kvichak district will have a strong showing again this year, as more than 30 million salmon are expected to return. The Kvichak River will be the hot spot: some 25 million reds are predicted to ply its waters, while the fishermen's share should be a healthy 15 million catch, with 10 million needed for escapement.

The Naknek River will see about 5 million fish this year, with gillnetters reeling in some 4 million, while Egegik fishermen will catch about 12 million reds from a total run of 13 million, up from last year's catch of 10 million.

Bristol Bay limited entry permits are also enjoying healthy increases, as they are quickly approaching the \$200,000 mark for permit-only.

My family and I are commercial salmon fishers on the Kvichak River in Alaska, which has the largest sockeye salmon run in the world. More than 25 million salmon are expected to return this summer, and 10 million will migrate 68 miles up the damless Kvichak to spawn.

More salmon are returning to the Kvichak since foreign fishing fleets, primarily Japanese, have been curtailed. Salmon do run in cycles, however, and there were years on the Kvichak in the '70s when fishermen worried over poor returns.

But with commercial fishing as the only man-made variable, Mother Nature and fish and game managers were able to sustain the run with its highs and lows.

There are other healthy salmon runs in Alaska, all on damless rivers, with no logging near spawning areas, agricultural diversions or power-guzzling industries.

There are too many variables on the Columbia: eight dams, thousands of sportfishermen and a dying commercial fishery that everyone loves to use as the whipping boy.

—Jonnel Covault, Oak Grove

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Industry faced with shortage of capable crewmen

The declining salmon fishery has apparently convinced many experienced boat pullers to look for work elsewhere, as not only are the remaining captains having trouble finding fish, some are also having trouble finding crews.

"We've got boats looking for crewmen from Eureka to Westport," says Dennis Degner, a former commercial fisherman and current marine education instructor at Clatsop Community College in Astoria.

The lack of available, experienced crewmembers has put more than one fisherman in a real quandary.

"Last summer was a nightmare for everyone," said Terry Thompson, Oregon state representative and owner of a Newport-based trawler. "There were just no skilled people around at all."

Although last year's salmon fishery was the worst on record, most of the fishing industry targets other species which are doing well.

"Not to reduce the importance of salmon, but there are other fisheries that are healthy and that people are making a living at," Degner said.

In 1988, one of the best in years, salmon accounted for less than half the value of the entire commercial fishery.

But, in many cases, potential crewmen don't know that, and thus fish boats from northern California to southern Washington have had difficulty finding crews with both the necessary skills and the desire to take the jobs.

In an informal survey, Degner found that some boats in Astoria, Newport and Brookings had missed valuable fishing

Clatsop Community College starts a "boat puller" training program after some commercial fishers say they've missed fishing time because they couldn't find crews

time because they couldn't find adequate crews.

So Clatsop Community College, which already offers top-notch courses in marine safety, net-mending and other fishery-related subjects, has added a training program designed to prepare potential deckhands for the various rigors of work aboard the boats.

Commercial fishing, unquestionably one of the most dangerous occupations in the world, is known for long, hard hours and grueling work, but it can still provide a good living for those who treat it with respect.

Much of the series of 14 one-week

courses, which can be taken independently, take place aboard the college's own 50-foot training vessel *Forerunner*, and concludes with four weeks of at-sea fishing experience aboard boats with experienced skippers.

Learning crewmembers cover such important topics as fishing safety, watch-keeping, navigation and rigging skills. Degner believes he can place some 10-20 people in the fishing industry per year for the next several years.

"The north coast is fortunate to have such a great marine education program right here at Clatsop," says one Astoria fisherman who fishes Alaska's treacherous waters each summer. "The marine safety class is something all fishermen should take, especially with all these boats going down."

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NEWSFLASH: Overfishing on the Columbia isn't the problem

I grit my teeth every time "overfishing" is mentioned as a primary cause for our diminishing salmon runs in the Columbia River and elsewhere.

If it hadn't been for lower Columbia River Gillnetters, there wouldn't be any salmon in the Columbia left to fight over.

In the Daily Astorian of Oct. 19, 1933, a plan for the proposed Bonneville Dam was shown with no provision for a fish ladder. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was planning a fish trap and elevator hoist and thought the rest of the run would go up through the locks.

The headline of the Daily Astorian on Dec. 1, 1933 read: "Dam is fatal — U.S. experts see doom for Columbia River salmon." A Mr. G.C. Leech was quoted as saying that "downstream migrants will be the problem."

Another headline said, "Corps of Engineers says dam will have little or no effect on regularity or abundance of the salmon runs." (Does that sound familiar?)

Charles Knapp, an Astoria gillnetter and president of the Kiwanis, gathered a group of gillnetters and conservationists to petition the Corps of Engineers for a fish ladder. The rest is history.

So that's why we have any salmon left in the Columbia today below Grand Coulee. That dam was too high for a fish ladder and became the end of the trail for salmon, including the once-famous June hogs [Royal Chinooks].

Commercial fishermen have always had a vested interest in maintaining Oregon's renewable fishery resources. They make a career of harvesting fish as healthy food for millions of consumers who don't fish for themselves.

Being highly visible has made commercial fishing an easy scapegoat for the finger pointers. The picture of a fisherman removing a salmon from his net or hook is easy to see.

But who sees the multimillion fish killed by the invisible practices that have gone on nearly unchanged for decades?

If all salmon fishing had ceased 50 years ago, but dam building, water diversion and habitat degradation had progressed as they have, the salmon's future would be the same: eventual extinction!

The basic needs for every animal (in-

cluding fish) are food and shelter. Without favorable habitat, both in river and ocean, the salmon are doomed, whether or not they are fished.

In a nutshell, the problems facing salmon are:

- Loss of flow due to diversion and other water uses.
- Loss of cover (including dam impoundments).
- Water temperature.
- Cumulative sedimentation (mud covering spawning gravel).
- A persistent El Nino, making oceans warmer with less upwelling (which means less food and more predators).

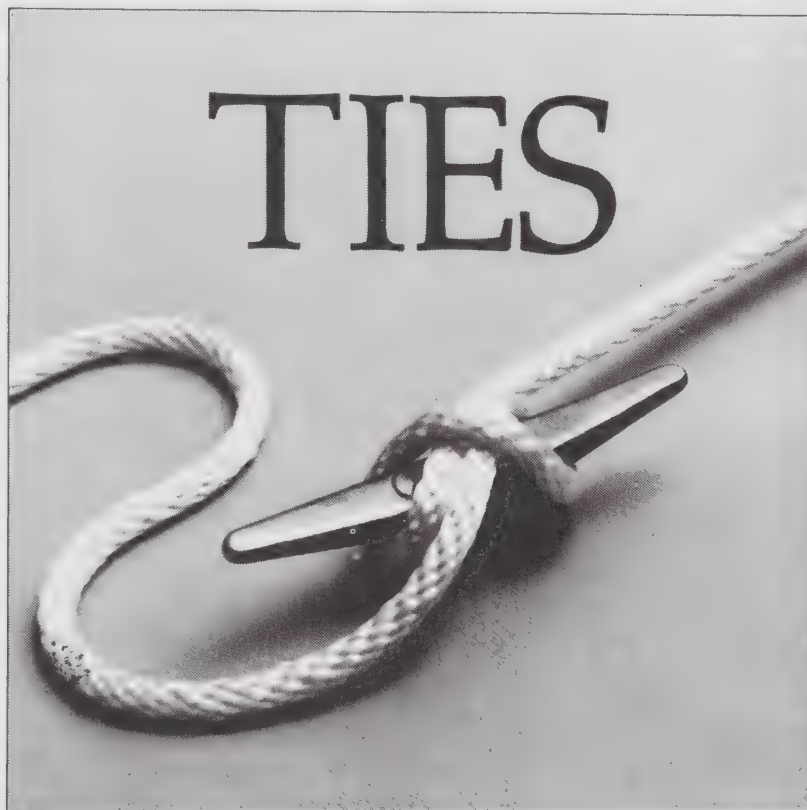
Some bureaucrats say we need to give up on the recovery programs because

they'll cost too much. Salmon have played an important role in the culture, commerce and tradition of Oregon since before recorded history. Can anyone planning to live a lifetime here imagine Oregon without salmon?

We're at a critical point in history. It's finally time for the dam builders, water diversionists and habitat degraders to own up to the damage done to salmon in the name of progress for all these years — and pay the piper.

The lower river gillnetters aren't strong enough anymore to come to the rescue alone. Now is the time for all Oregonians to stand up and speak for the salmon.

—Herb Goblirsch, commercial fisherman
Otter Rock



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Waves from the past

Continued from the last issue

Once a day, at low water slack, a double-ender would be used to remove the fish from the trap. As a youngster, I felt this was the most fun of the day.

The next step for the fish was the "big pot," similar in principle to a common crab pot, located upstream from the heart, connected by a tunnel which allowed the fish to enter the pot, but not to escape.

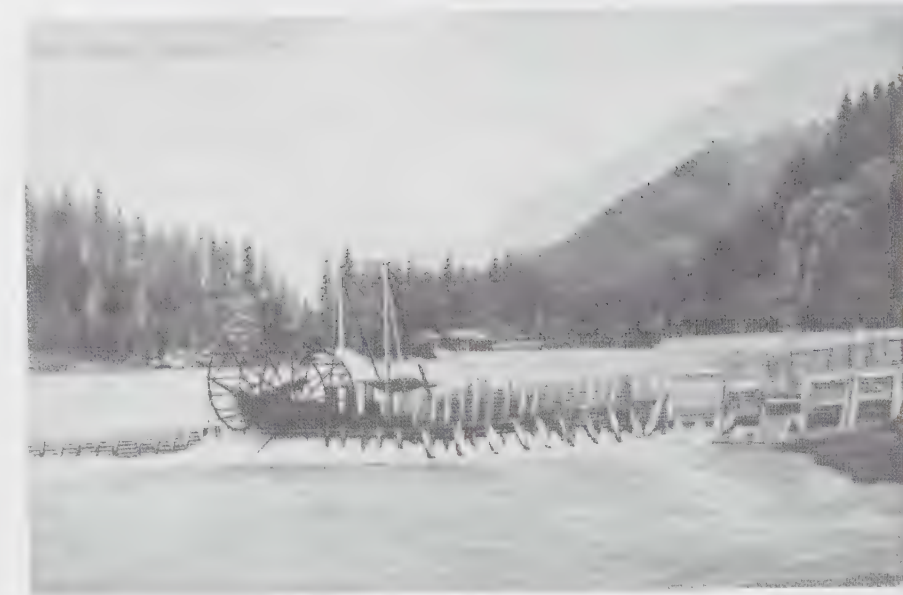
The web was hung on pilings arranged in a square, usually with about 20-foot sides, but the size would vary depending on the location. The top edge of the pot was hung from halyards attached to the piling. The bottom edge was held in place by underwater pulleys or "chains" as they were called. The bottom of the pot was usually about 8 to 10 feet below the low water line and did not go clear to the bottom.

The Spiller: This was an encloser of similar design, but smaller in size located upstream from the big pot. The two were connected by a smaller tunnel. Escape, once inside the spiller, was almost 100% safe.

The Boom: The boom was a line of pilings strung with heavy-gauge fence wire upstream from the spiller. Its function was to catch drift and debris from lodging against the spiller on ebb tide.

Traps located in strong ebb tide areas, usually in deeper water, had their pilings reinforced with "rim poles," smaller pilings lashed horizontally to the piling above the high water mark.

Cable and chain were also strung between piles in a similar manner in areas of



less current. This reinforcement added stability by preventing a single pile from swaying on strong ebbs. If not secured properly, especially when no gear was fishing, the pile would eventually work its way out of the bottom.

Festus Plumb of Chinook owned a trap immediately downstream from the old Pt. Ellice ferry landing in about 40 feet of water. This trap had the strongest ebb current of any of the outside-tier traps that extended to the head of Sand Island. It seemed when the ebb rounded Pt. Ellice, it really started to boil when it reached the Plumb trap about 600 yards downstream.

Lifting and Spilling: Once a day, at low water slack, a double-ended skiff

would be used to remove the fish from the trap. With a capacity of 3,000 to 5,000 pounds, the skiffs were used to remove or "spill" the fish. One side-wall of the spiller would be lowered and the skiff positioned inside. The wall would then be raised back up. Progressive raising of one wall and the bottom section over the side of the skiff would bring the fish to the surface. A gaf hook would be used to lift the fish into the boat.

As a youngster, I felt this was the most fun of the day. One had to wear "gum boots" and oilskins to keep from getting soaked from the thrashing of the fish.

Gillnetters vs. Trappers: It's been said that in the early years feelings

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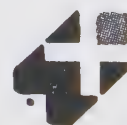
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between gillnetters and trappers were strained to say the least. A little-known observation, but one which the oldtimers felt was true, was that the gillnets were actually a benefit to the outside tier of traps.

In August, in clear water on the day floods, the fish would tend to lead off the inside end of the gillnet, and eventually work its way into the trap. Sounds plausible, doesn't it?

The Gradual Decline: The Columbia River was the cradle of the greatest Chinook salmon run in the world. Over time, the depletion led to eliminating the various methods of harvest.

The first to go were the purse seines at the mouth of the river. Next came the fish wheels, traps, seines and set-nets.

Presently we have gillnetters as the only commercial fishery surviving, if we can call it that. Politics, mother nature and management will give us the answers.

Will it survive? I would like to think that it will.

—Harold Nelson

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Harold "Harry" Nelson, a longtime native of the North Coast, was born at McGowan, Wash., in the home of his grandparents.

Mr. Nelson attended school at the old Alderbrook and Central grade schools. He graduated from Astoria High School in 1936 and Oregon State University in 1942.

Both of his grandfathers were commercial fishermen. Two of his uncles, as well as his father, were longtime tugboat and cannery tender captains.

He worked as a deckhand on tugboats, ferries and tenders, as well as a captain for Arrow Tug & Barge. His last run down the river was New Year's Eve, 1941.

Mr. Nelson served the U.S. Navy as an officer on a YMS-class minesweeper during WWII.

He retired in 1978 after 32 years with Pacific Northwest Bell.



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Russia's poor economy taking its toll on fish

The chaotic state of Russia's economy has begun to take a heavy toll on fish, say three scientists with the Center for the Analysis of Environmental Change at Oregon State University.

The team of Oregon researchers recently spent three weeks on rivers in Russia's far east, joining Russian researchers in studying the area's rapidly changing environment.

"I think the biggest problem they have right now from a fisheries standpoint is not directly related to the timber harvest," says Jeff Rodgers with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, one of the scientists who made the trip. "It's more related to erosion caused by road-building activities.

"The roads are poorly constructed, with no culverts or poorly-maintained culverts. With the change to the free-market system, there's really no one who's maintaining the roads. The sediment is having a major impact on spawning habitat," he said.

The scientists discovered that the resulting loss of the chum salmon fishery has hit the area especially hard, as many Russians still subsist on hunting and fishing.

"We both have salmon, and we both have problems, and there are things we can learn from each other on both sides of the Pacific.

"By understanding interactions of the climate and land use and what's happening to the fisheries throughout their range, we could get a better idea of large-scale processes that are affecting salmon in the Pacific Northwest."



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Wild grass gains strong foothold on Willapa Bay habitat

But oyster farmers fear using herbicides to control spartina will hurt the ecosystem

NAHCOTTA, Wash.— A hardy, exotic plant with no natural predators is rapidly gaining a strong foothold in the pristine tidal zone of western Washington's Willapa Bay, and is threatening to change the face of the area forever.

Spartina, a type of cordgrass originally native only to the east coast, is thriving in about 3,000 acres of Willapa Bay, the home of the nation's second-largest oyster industry.

"We're talking about something that's a fairly recent transformation," says Kathleen Sayce, a botanist and conservation director of the local chapter of the Sierra Club. She has watched the marshy tidal flat in front of her bayside home transform into a huge expanse of dry, tough, tall cordgrass.

"I can see us losing whole areas of habitat," Sayce says. Thousands of ducks and other migratory birds used to flock to the area in front of her house. Children dug clams. She could paddle her canoe out on the bay and return almost to her front door.

But the clam beds are gone, the birds don't come anymore, and it's a good quarter-mile walk to the water now.

Spartina has eagerly invaded here and has replaced the common eelgrass, which provides important food and habitat for juvenile salmon, with a dry, level meadow with deep water channels.

Sayce and many others think spartina is a grave threat to the Willapa Bay eco-

system, and says using herbicides, at least on some scale, is realistically the only way to curb its appetite.

Since the late 1800s when it was used as packing material for oysters, spartina has been slow-growing. Over the years, however, its ability to reproduce has increased, and El Nino's warmer, drier weather during the past decade or so has caused its population to explode.

"It's pretty scary, it spreads so fast," says Jim Hidy, manager of the Willapa Bay Wildlife Refuge, feeding grounds for thousands of migrating ducks, geese and other waterfowl.

"The most important zone for feeding birds, the upper mudflat, is being invaded the most rapidly," Hidy says. Spartina's roots trap sediment, turning sloping tidal mudflats into dense, thick clumps of

grass, potentially harming food chain production, flood control and water purification.

But the road to an agreement on what to do about it has been rough.

Surprisingly, many environmental groups favor the use of herbicides as the "lesser of two evils," even though some oyster farmers fear that using herbicides would degrade the area's habitat.

Negotiations are ongoing, but it's likely some herbicides will be used this summer.

"It's not something we like to do," Sayce says, "but the question is do you want the bay, or do you want a meadow?"



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Seals, sea lions & salmon: It's a free lunch

Two Washington Indian tribes declare open season on the marine mammals

Twenty years ago a California sea lion, or its smaller resident cousin the Pacific harbor seal, was a fairly rare sight along the Columbia River, especially above Astoria.

There was none of the constant barking from the fifty or so mammals which lounge on the rocks at Astoria's east end mooring basin.

But today seals and sea lions by the hundreds follow the spring smelt run all the way up the Columbia to the Cowlitz River, while some even make it to Bonneville Dam.

While everyone enjoys their comical antics, these marine mammals are raising havoc on steelhead and salmon, as well as smelt, and Northwest fishermen have had just about enough.

"The fish [smelt] try to group up to spawn, and the sea lions just scatter them," says Greg Gilmore, a commercial smelt fisherman from Longview. "It's ridiculous."

Lower river gillnet fishermen have been hit especially hard by the population explosion, as they are all but powerless to keep the animals from stealing salmon from their nets.

"It happens all the time," says Robin Brown, a wildlife biologist and marine mammal specialist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. "Especially sea lions. They're much bolder than seals. I've seen it hundreds of times. Essentially, it's a free lunch."

After the Marine Mammal Protection Act passed in 1972, seal and sea lion numbers grew.

And grew.

Some 12,000 California sea lions from Astoria to Puget Sound to British Columbia now call the area home. ODFW estimates more than 500 were counted at the mouth of the Columbia last winter, and the number grows to 700 between fall and spring.

"Maybe several hundred go up the Columbia to the Cowlitz and Willamette," Brown says. Winter counts show about

2,500 seals in the Columbia, most in the Astoria area, Brown says. He estimates the total river population at about 3,000. Numbers decline in the spring, as seals return to the coast to give birth. By summer, just 500 to 1,000 remain.

The wildly increasing number of seals and sea lions has sparked some Northwest Indian tribes to resume their traditional, treaty-assured hunting rights.

Two coastal Washington tribes, the Makah and the Quileute, have opened seal and sea lion hunting seasons, while the Muckleshoot Tribe near Puget Sound is also considering one.

"The animals are causing havoc with the right to catch salmon," says Frank Simmons, a natural resources technician for the Siletz Tribe.

What's the difference between a seal and a sea lion? Sea lions have ear-flaps, seals don't. Seals swim with their back flippers, while sea lions glide through the

water with their front flippers. Seals can't use their hind flippers to walk while on land, but sea lions can stand on all fours and manage a gallop.

A 200-pound seal can easily consume some 8 to 10 pounds of fish a day, while the bigger sea lions can handle a whopping 20 to 30 pounds of tasty fish.

Here in Oregon, the harbor seal is a native year-round resident, while the California sea lion and a small number of Steller sea lions also call Oregon home. Male sea lions migrate from California to Alaska while the females give birth and remain in California.

Both seals and sea lions prefer smelt over salmon and steelhead, biologists say, but when the smelt runs subside, they'll do just fine, thank you. Their voracious appetite prompted the amending of the mammal act last year to allow some killing to control animals dining on endangered salmon runs.

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Go West, young man

A view of old downtown Astoria, facing west toward the Pacific, during the late 1800s. Note the absence of the Astoria and Youngs Bay bridges, and no paved streets!

FACT FROM THE PAST

Clatsop Indian Chief Tostum reportedly caught a 95-pound chinook salmon in 1860, the largest ever recorded caught on the Columbia River.

In second place were two healthy 87-pounders caught in 1914 and 1931, while two 85-pound salmon were caught in 1907 and 1925.

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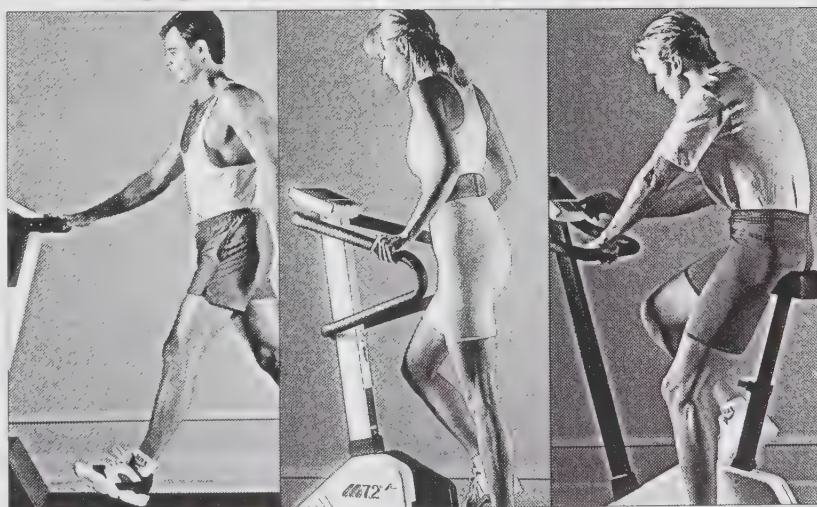
When Alaska's Tommy Moe won gold and silver medals in the downhill skiing event during the '94 Winter Olympics, the Norwegian team tried to have him stripped of his medals, as Olympic rules prohibit outward endorsements during the games, and Moe was sporting a wild Alaska salmon on his visor.





AN OLD SIGHT TO SEE — This photograph captures float houses and rare floating netracks off of Tongue Point, about 1890. The scows in background are fish buyers. Note the double-ended, sail-powered gillnet boats.

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Aluminum manufacturers behind proposed initiative

They're at it again, those sportfishing friends of ours up in the good state of Washington.

This time, a small group, with the financial help of influential industrial water users, has proposed a Washington state ballot initiative, humorously titled "Save Our Sealife." It's simply another not-so-clever but serious scheme the sports have cooked up to try to allocate more salmon to their side of the table.

You'd think conservation groups would jump at the chance to stop commercial fishing, but this time environmentalists aren't buying it.

Greenpeace has already denied requests from the initiative's backers for film footage of fish and marine mammals caught in high-seas Asian driftnets — an unabashed attempt by the backers to paint American fishermen with the same broad brush. Other conservation groups are

"If we don't stop them here, there's no second chance."

steering clear as well.

But this initiative, unlike ones that have come before it, appears due to the efforts of the Columbia River Alliance, whose director Bruce Lovelin was a member of the initiative group's advisory team. It's expected the alliance will be a heavy contributor to the initiative.

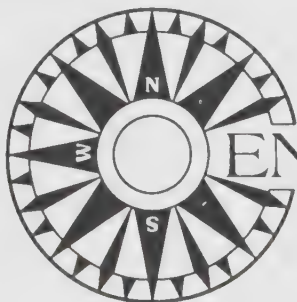
But, commercial fishermen and a sensible, broad-based faction of environmental as well as sportfishing groups, see the proposal as nothing more than a blatant attempt to further the financial interests of the aluminum industry and other water users, while funneling more of a shrinking resource to one user group. That gives senseless priority to one group over

another, as sportfishermen take more endangered upriver salmon than lower river gillnetters do.

"It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see the sports want the salmon and sturgeon all to themselves, while the aluminum industry is jumping in [to support the measure] so it will have one less user group to deal with," says one Astoria gillnetter. "It's the same old story, with a new player."

The measure calls for "the protection of living marine resources including salmon and steelhead from wasteful and harmful fishing practices," which, naturally, would include commercial salmon fisheries like gillnetters and trollers.

"If we don't stop them here, there's no second chance," says Bristol Bay gillnetter Anne Mosness of the Washington Seafood Alliance, the group formed to fight the proposed measure.



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Norwegian whale fishermen under attack

The Whaling Commission says it won't harm stocks but environmentalists want it stopped anyway

REINE, Norway — A tiny fishing village, just north of the Arctic Circle.

The seas are blue, cold and calm, but it's anything but smooth sailing for the small number of Norwegian whale fishermen here whose families have fished for generations.

Declared an "Environmental Enemy" by various groups such as Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd, the two-hundred or so Norwegian fishermen who make their living from combining minke whaling with fishing are in a serious fight for their livelihoods, even though biological authorities and scientific facts seem to be on their side.

"In all reasonableness we would have to say that a commercial catch could be taken without endangering these stocks," says Dr. Ray Gambell, secretary of the

International Whaling Commission, in reference to the stocks in the North Atlantic and the Southern Hemisphere, where minke whales number about 760,000.

Norwegian fishermen here take an annual quota of less than 300 whales, with nearly half of these studied for scientific purposes not commercial. The estimated stock of minke whales in this area of the northeast Atlantic numbers about 90,000.

Even so, among those who have declared war on the fishermen include the California-based environmental group Sea Shepherd, which, just over two years ago, attempted to sink a Norwegian fishing vessel in the harbor. Greenpeace, meanwhile, says that it will flex its muscles where it hurts the most — the national economy.

It hopes to turn Norwegians against their own people by trying to persuade chain stores and importers to boycott Norwegian products, and by pressuring

the U.S. government into imposing trade sanctions.

But U.S. authorities, via a governmental note to Iceland and Norway, are acknowledging that minke whale stocks are capable of being harvested on a sustainable basis, even though some lawmakers like Gerry Studds, chairman of the Merchant and Marine Fisheries Committee, have joined on the environmental bandwagon to oppose whaling.

"But I don't think people know that much about it — they think we're out to catch the last remaining whale," says Bjorn Hugo Bendiksen, a 29-year-old fishermen whose family has fished for generations.

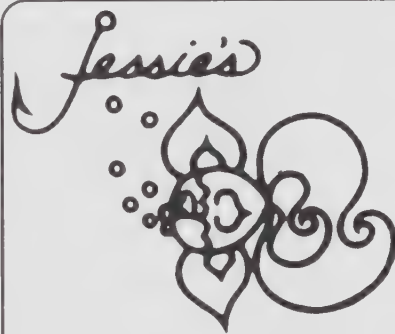
Bjorn is proud of his livelihood. "It was an easy choice for me to make. Fishing is hard work, but it provides you with a meaningful and exciting life where no one day is like the next. It all depends on how good you are and how willing you are to make a go of it."

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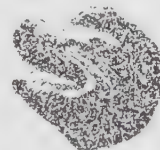
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JOHN VLASTELICIA Sr. 1903-1994

Longtime North Coast resident John J. Vlastelicia Sr. passed away November 29, 1994 in Astoria. He was 91.

Mr. Vlastelicia was born in Clifton on June 11, 1903 to Bortul and Anna Vlastelicia. He attended the old Clifton school and worked as a Columbia River gillnet fisherman for many years.

He married Velma Koppisch on December 26, 1931 in Cathlamet, Wash., and they lived in Clifton until 1941 when they moved to the Knappa/Svensen area.

Mrs. Vlastelicia, a longtime elementary school teacher, preceded her husband in death on September 20, 1985.

Mr. Vlastelicia enjoyed playing the banjo and often entertained at local senior citizen gatherings. He was also known as a seasoned Slavonian cook, and was a member of St. Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Church in Astoria.

He is survived by a son and daughter-in-law, John and Charlotte Vlastelicia Jr. of Scappoose; a daughter and son-in-law, Alta and Douglas Goertzen of Scappoose; a daughter, Janice Bechtolt of St. Helens, ten grandchildren, five great-grandchildren and several nieces and nephews.

CARL E. FORSBERG 1910-1994

Carl E. Forsberg passed away October 5, 1994, in Longview, Wash. at the age of 84.

Born in North Dakota in 1910 to Nels and Carrie Forsberg, the family moved to Ridgefield, Wash. when he was 2.

Mr. Forsberg began gillnet fishing with his father when he was 13. He earned a teaching certificate from Monmouth College (Western Oregon State), but after a year of teaching began fishing for Bumble Bee Seafoods, because "there was more money and more fun in it."

Carl fished the Columbia for more than 50 years and was well known up and down the river. He served as secretary for the Columbia River Fishermen's Union, and was a strong advocate against river pollution.

Mr. Forsberg fished many years on the Bachelor Island drift, and was typically one of the top boats at Scandinavian station. A staunch businessman, Carl ran several businesses in Longview, and served on the Longview City Council.

Mr. Forsberg is survived by his wife, Alona of Eagle Cliff, Wash., brother Ralph of Longview and several nieces and nephews.

JIM F. PARKER 1926-1995

Astoria native Jim F. Parker passed away February 24 in Astoria. He was 68.

Mr. Parker was born in Astoria on March 21, 1926, to Bessy Siddall and Charles Parker. He attended Astoria-area schools and graduated from Astoria High School. He served with the U.S. Navy during World War II in the Pacific Theater. He married Francine Scott on April 19, 1947, in Astoria. She survives.

Mr. Parker worked several years in heavy construction for Grimstad and Vandervelt, working on the foundation of the Astoria/Megler bridge. He was the longtime captain of the F/V *Rose Ann Hess*, and also represented Oregon commercial fishermen in Washington D.C. for six years.

Mr. Parker was the owner/operator of Jim's Marine Service and Rock Products Co. for many years. He enjoyed cutting firewood, crawfishing, fishing, clamdigging, woodworking and gardening. A man of reason and logic who saw things in black and white, he will be long remembered for his love of Astoria, his devotion to his family and helping others.

He was a member of the American Legion, the Eagles, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Elks and Clatsop County Historical Society, and was also involved in local political issues.

Mr. Parker is also survived by two sons and daughters-in-law, Charles "Scott" and Mary Anita Parker of Warrenton, "Little" Jim and Sheree Parker of Astoria; a daughter and son-in-law, Gayle Parker-Hagle and Richard of Astoria; one daughter, Peggy Parker-McCleary of Astoria; three brothers, Wilder Parker of Eugene, Frank Parker of Kodiak, Alaska, and Eben Parker of Warrenton; two sisters, Betty Anderson of Kelso, Washington, and Sister Rosemary Ann of Portland and mother-in-law Daphne Scott of Astoria.

Also surviving are nine grandchildren, Christina Riser, Zachary Storey, Monty McCleary, Grady James Parker and Meagan Parker, all of Astoria, Laura and Scott Parker of Warrenton, Jenny Houck of Bend and Casey Parker of Providence, R.I.; one grandson and his wife, Danny and Laurie Riser of Astoria, and two great-granddaughters Renee and Cali Riser of Astoria.



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DEAD FISH: Nitrogen-saturated water kills 60,000 in pens

PORTLAND, OR — More than 60,000 young spring chinook salmon died in net pens here in February when heavy winter rains caused the swollen Willamette River to become saturated with atmospheric nitrogen.

Part of a lower Willamette hatchery planting project by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the spring chinook were placed in net pens just upriver from the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry. They were due to be released into the Portland harbor on March 10.

But pounding, relentless northwest rains this winter sent nitrogen-supersaturated water from runoff over Willamette Falls down the river to the temporary net pens, and the fish could not escape into deeper water.

Barry McPherson, salmon production leader for the ODFW, said it isn't known how many fish survived the nitrogen flow, but it could have been as many as 40,000. These fish were kept and released on the scheduled date to salvage part of the experiment, which was to see if the released chinook would return to

the area as adult salmon and become targets for sport fishermen.

Meanwhile, more than \$1 million will be spent to restore part of the John Day River where some 100,000 fish were killed by a hydrochloric acid spill in 1990.

The spill occurred in February 1990 when a tanker truck skidded off U.S. Highway 395 into the north fork of the John Day River, spilling more than 3,500

gallons of hydrochloric acid into the water. The Thatcher Co., which owned and operated the truck, agreed to pay \$275,000 toward the restoration project.

"This settlement and this restoration plan are prime examples of the cooperation that can be achieved to benefit the water, land, fish and wildlife," said Donald Sampson, chairman of the Umatilla Tribe board of trustees, involved in the settlement.

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Coalition offers salmon plan

Save Our Wild Salmon coalition releases its citizens blueprint for salmon recovery

A plan for saving the Northwest's disappearing salmon runs has been released by Save Our Wild Salmon, a group of environmentalists, sports and commercial fishing organizations as well as Indian tribes which has set aside its differences to focus on a common goal of saving salmon.

Believing that letting Northwest salmon disappear would ultimately cost the region much more than saving salmon would, the group has created a "citizens blueprint" to help restore once-abundant salmon runs.

The plan, released in January, is called "Wild Salmon Forever," and is supported not only by commercial and sport fishermen alike, but also by environmentalists and several heavyweight regional retail sporting goods outlets such as G.I. Joe's and Fred Meyer.

Together the 44 groups represented throw considerable economic and political weight to the salmon debate.

The proposal focuses on improvements in four key areas that affect salmon: harvest, hatcheries, habitat and hydropower. The plan covers all salmon streams, not just the mainstream Columbia River.

"If we lose salmon we don't just lose a fish, we lose our heritage and an economically important industry," said Phil Jensen, a Hood River manufacturer of fishing lures. "Commercial and sport fishing, tourism and other salmon-related businesses are all imperiled."

Chief points of the salmon restoration plan include:

- *Putting a stop to barging and trucking salmon down the river.*
- *Refitting Columbia and Snake River hydroelectric dams to improve fish passage, while removing the dams that do more harm than good.*
- *Restoring stream conditions on federal, state and private lands, using financial enticements to get landowners to go along.*
- *Drawing down lower Snake River reservoirs for up to three months to flush young salmon to the sea without draining upper Snake reservoirs.*
- *Reforming hatchery practices to enhance wild salmon runs.*
- *Improving selective fishing practices to protect wild runs.*

The salmon plan illustrates just how harsh the struggle is between those industries dependent on abundant salmon runs and those that depend on the cheap water and power dams provide, such as aluminum smelters and agriculture.

But, scientific and government data in the wild salmon plan shows that improving fish passage at Columbia River dams would cost power customers much less than they currently pay to subsidize Northwest irrigators.

An average of 75 cents to \$1.50 a month would be added to the bill of an average public power customer under the wild salmon proposal. By comparison, government subsidies to Northwest irrigators cost the average customer \$2 to \$4 a month.

BARGING'S NOT THE ANSWER

I was outraged to see [The Oregonian] cast doubt on the Northwest Power Planning Council's recovery plan by citing University of Washington biologist Jim Anderson's conclusion that only barging more fish will save them.

Though I don't question Anderson's ability as a scientist, I would question his objectivity on this issue. The Bonneville Power Administration has funded his pro-barging research with more than \$4.25 million.

Furthermore, he has close connections with the Columbia River Alliance — another group with a vested interest in maintaining current barging practices. To introduce Anderson into the debate without identifying this potential conflict of interest is disingenuous.

The concept of barging was started more than 15 years ago as an emergency measure and clearly has not worked. Hauling juvenile salmon does more harm than good. Trapping, handling and hauling inflict injuries, increase diseases and disrupt a salmon's homing ability.

Unbiased science has finally caught up to common sense — salmon belong in the river, not in the hold of a barge or a tank truck.

If barging worked, we wouldn't need to spend millions to prove it, and we wouldn't have an extinction emergency.

—Liz Hamilton, member of Save Our Wild Salmon

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HOT OFF THE PRESS: "A Common Fate" is a good read

A recently-published book tracking the rise and fall of endangered Columbia River salmon and its effects on the lives of people in the Northwest has hit bookstore shelves.

"A Common Fate, Endangered Salmon and the People of the Pacific Northwest" is written by Joseph Cone, Director of Communications for the Oregon Sea Grant marine research and education program at Oregon State University.

The new book is a colorful, well-written, to-the-point tale of the trials of salmon, and is blunt about why they're disappearing:

After the dams were constructed they were the major cause of the salmon's steep decline. They cut the salmon off from their spawning areas altogether in huge areas. Grand Coulee Dam on the Columbia in north central Washington, and Hells Canyon Dam on the Snake, along the Oregon-Idaho border, were built without means of getting fish over them. Together they eliminated more than one-third of all the salmon habitat in the entire Columbia-Snake basin.

"A Common Fate" takes the reader back to a time when men truly lived off the land, and describes life in Astoria in storyteller fashion:

During the early boom years, Astoria was a man's town and a rough place. One notorious part, "Swill Town," housed most of Astoria's forty saloons, its gambling houses and the red light district.

Much of the city was built on pilings over the mud flats. Conditions would have given a latter day Department of

Environmental Quality conniptions. Household wastes and fish processing wastes were both swept directly into the Columbia through cracks in the floors.

The book also traces the beginnings of the Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union back in 1886:

Among all the institutions reflecting the trend toward greater permanence in Astoria, the main institution of the fishermen was the Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union.

Organized in 1886, the union set about to extract concessions from the cannery owners. In two years the price the canneries paid per fish more than doubled, from 55 cents per fish in 1886 to \$1.25 per fish in 1888.

From the beginning, the Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union was plain about its principles. "The greatest good for the greatest number is still an ever-living maxim among our fellow countrymen," a union publication expressed in 1890. The union was equally

unequivocal about whom it trusted and didn't trust. "No liquor dealer, gambler, politician, capitalist, lawyer, agent for capitalists, nor persons holding office, whether under national, state, or municipal government shall under any consideration become members," the union's constitution read.

The book gives a colorful depiction of the way life used to be all along the river, stopping at various points of interest and conflict along the way, with modern-day salmon troubles spiced in between.

The sometimes violent confrontations between gillnetters and their various adversaries over the years, including trap fishermen, cannery owners and sport fishermen, are especially interesting:

Into this volatile mixture of gillnetters and trapmen, of union members and cannery owners, only a spark was needed to set off an explosion.

"A Common Fate" is a unique, original tale of Columbia River history which is well worth a look.



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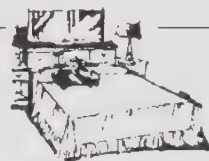
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Federal funds help new net pen projects

ASTORIA — Nearly \$1 million in funds from the Bonneville Power Administration will help jump-start three new terminal fisheries on the lower Columbia River.

Young coho and chinook salmon will soon be raised in new net pens placed at Tongue Point, Blind Slough and Deep River, Washington. They will be released to the ocean in May and August, and harvested by fishermen when they return to these protected inlets on the Columbia.

"It's easy to feel powerless with the gridlock we've seen," said Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber, during a recent visit to the Tongue Point net pen site.

The governor pointed at the some 500 people employed in the Columbia River aluminum industry, as compared to the thousands of Northwest fishermen feeling the economic bite of failing salmon runs.

"Look at the people dislocated and potentially dislocated in the fishing industry," Kitzhaber said, "It's far higher than that."

The three new net pen sites will join the already successful Youngs Bay fishery, which brought nearly \$500,000 to the local economy last year, the only commercial fishery on the Columbia in 1994.

"Today's story is not one of failure, but one of promise," said Bob Eaton, director of Salmon for All. "It's the beginning of a new future for a new economy for lower river communities."

Each terminal fishing site could accommodate up to 60 fish boats, says Jim Hill, director of the Youngs Bay fishery project for the Clatsop Economic Development Council.

"Youngs Bay was initiated as a compliment to the mainstem, but as the Columbia's fisheries have changed, its role is changing," he says. "Terminal fisheries are providing the backbone of what once was."

The first trial harvests at the three new terminal fisheries are scheduled for 1996, with a possible fourth site being placed at Clifton or Skamokawa, Wash.

SNAG DIVING

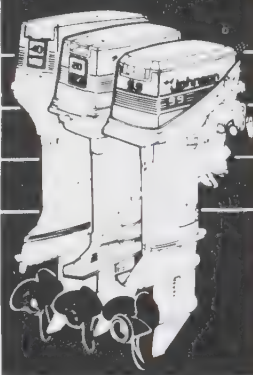
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Fishermen contributing receive a boat window sticker and receipt — Your help is appreciated —

What next! More troubles for the John Day Dam

RUFUS — It carries the nickname of "fish killer."

The newest hydroelectric dam on the lower Columbia system, the John Day, located 25 miles east of The Dalles, has been plagued with problems since it was put on line in 1968.

More than a decade ago, some \$3.5 million was spent to repair a huge 250-foot-long crack in the giant concrete wall of the navigation lock, which was first noticed in 1975, just seven years after the dam was built.

Two dam employees were trapped and nearly drowned in chest-high, 40-degree water when an internal passageway in the dam's powerhouse unexpectedly flooded in the winter of 1986.

In 1990, a fire in the powerhouse did about \$750,000 damage, and took the dam's 16 powerful generators off-line for several days.

And, despite an elaborate, expensive (\$23 million) fish bypass system which was installed in 1987, the John Day still has a dismal fish passage rate, and continues to be a major killer of fish today.

The most recent troubles have a contractor drilling two 240-foot holes into the dam's underlying bedrock, searching for the source of the water which has continued to seep under the dam's powerhouse since it was built.

Even though U.S. Army Corps of Engineers say they aren't worried about the dam's structural integrity and the drilling is just routine, concerns about the seeping water remain.

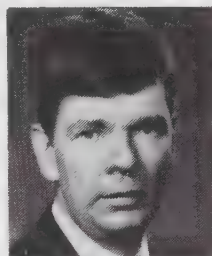
"We want people to understand that because there's a drill rig sitting up on the dam does not mean there's any concern or threat of any serious problem," says John Sager, chief of geotechnical engineering for the corps.

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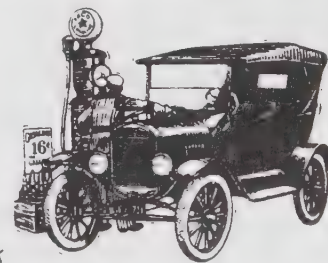
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New Astoria seafood center will give economy a boost

ASTORIA — U.S. Sen. Mark Hatfield, U.S. Rep. Elizabeth Furse and other dignitaries converged here recently to attend the celebration groundbreaking ceremonies for a state-of-the-art seafood laboratory that's intended to give an economic boost to Oregon's seafood industry.

"The lab is a product of an extraordinary level of cooperation by the community and several levels of government and education," said Thayne Dutson, dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences at Oregon State University, and director of the Oregon Agricultural Experiment Station, which will operate the laboratory.

Funding for the \$4 million lab includes \$2 million from the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, \$300,000 from the City of Astoria, \$100,000 from the Oregon Dept. of Economic Development and \$1.6 million from OSU.

The laboratory is phase one of a complex that will include the seafood lab, a large conference facility called the Duncan Law Seafood Consumer Center, and a privately operated hotel.

The lab will be part of the Coastal Oregon Marine Experiment Station based in Newport, one of 10 branches of the

Agricultural Experiment Station.

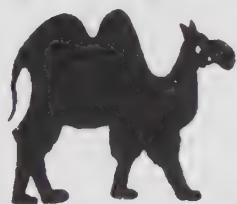
The new center will replace the outdated lab near Astoria's east end mooring basin where OSU currently does research, in cooperation with Oregon's seafood industry, on innovative seafood processing, development of value-added products, seafood biochemistry and waste utilization.

The lab is expected to be ready for occupancy by spring, 1996. Michael Morrissey, who began his duties as director of the current Seafood Laboratory in 1990, will continue as director of the new lab.

The seafood complex was conceived by Duncan Law, an OSU food technologist now retired, who saw a need for a facility that promotes research, training, marketing and seafood promotion.

Public and private organizations cooperating on construction and operation of the new seafood complex include the Columbia River Maritime Museum, the City of Astoria, OSU, Seafood Consumer Center Inc., Clatsop Community College, Clatsop County, Northwest Conference Resorts, the Port of Astoria and the Oregon Dept. of Economic Development.

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North Pacific remains a treacherous ocean

A flurry of local incidents reminds us that the Pacific is not to be taken lightly

Although Alaska has seen a marked decrease in marine-related fatalities in the past two years, the North Pacific remains one of the most dangerous bodies of water in the world.

The recent losses of the *Fierce Competitor*, the *Amber Dawn II* and others have served to remind us that commercial fishing is a risky, treacherous occupation, and no one can afford to stand still with regard to safety.

One way to improve conditions for the future, says Ken Lawrenson from the 13th Coast Guard District in Seattle, is by learning from the past. Unfortunately, most lessons are learned the hard way, which emphasizes the need for proper safety equipment and training for everyone on board.

A recent example of just how quickly things can get out of hand occurred on an early February morning aboard the F/V *Pacific Prospector*, a 62-foot Warrenton-based crabber working about 15 miles offshore.

It was just after 1 a.m. when crewman Chad Mason, 23, first smelled smoke. Standing watch at the wheel while the rest of the crew slept, he barely had time to rouse them before they were driven out on deck by thick, black smoke.

"It's amazing how fast fire can take things over," said 23-year-old skipper Dennis Sturgell Jr. of Warrenton.

The crew managed to battle the flames with fire extinguishers, while Sturgell

searched through the dense smoke for the radio to send a mayday. He did manage to get an SOS and the vessel's name out, but apparently the radio wasn't working. "I sucked in a lungful of smoke, and that was it," he said.

Driven out on deck, the four crewmen quickly realized they may have to abandon ship if the flames continued to spread. Even more harrowing was the

fact that their survival suits were stowed away out of reach in their bunks.

Luckily, eight miles away, an alert crewman standing watch on the *Frank & Maria*, a crabber out of Crescent City, California, spotted the glow of the fire, reversed course and rescued the crew some thirty minutes later.

The *Pacific Prospector*, now in a local shipyard, will likely be rebuilt.

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Sierra Club says stop the barging, reconfigure dams

The Corps of Engineers has engaged for the last 15 years in a massive program to capture smolts at upstream dams and transport them by barge and truck to the sea. Collecting the small fish inflicts injuries and severe physical stress that leads to high mortality when combined with crowded, unnatural, disease-breeding conditions in the barges and tank trucks.

Although the Corps relies heavily on barging, some biologists have reported that barging may have a negative impact on wild salmon that return to spawn. And, of course, despite the Corps' best and expensive efforts at barging, wild salmon stocks in the Snake River and elsewhere have continued to decline.

Without question, overfishing took place in the past. Today, however, there is effectively no legal in-river catch on three of the four Snake River salmon species now listed under the Endangered Species Act.

And, over this century, there has been significant, and steadily increased, regu-

lation of commercial fishing in the Columbia and Snake Rivers.

For mixed-stock runs, where wild and hatchery fish swim upstream together, harvest practices much change so that hatchery-bred fish are caught and wild salmon continue safely to their spawning grounds.

Instead, the utility industry has argued vehemently for a steep reduction, or even moratorium, on commercial fishing, diverting attention from the role that hydro-power dams have played in wiping out salmon.

The dramatic decline of wild salmon runs in the Pacific Northwest has reached a crisis. **It is high time for action to save this vital part of our Northwest**

heritage, environment and economy.

For the past thirty years, the federal hydropower agencies and the utility industry have tried everything but making the river work for fish. They have failed.

That is why fish advocates and conservationists have proposed physical and operational modifications to the Snake and Columbia mainstem dams in order to provide a safe, in-river migration for juvenile salmon.

We can have a river system that works for fish, energy and our other needs. But it calls for the commitment to change the currently destructive operation of Columbia and Snake River dams.

—From the Sierra Club's Pacific Northwest Wild Salmon Campaign

Umatilla tribes join the bandwagon

THE DALLES — Joining on the anti-dam, anti-barging, more water bandwagon, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation have released a salmon plan of their own.

"We must act decisively and we must act now," says William Burke, tribe treasurer. "Failure to do so will render wild salmon no more than a memory," he said.

The Umatilla plan focuses on changing water use priorities, especially irrigation practices. As an example of what can be

successfully done, Burke cited the Umatilla Basin Project, which restored salmon to a once-extinct river where the fish had been wiped out by an irrigation dam some 70 years earlier.

The Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, made up of the four tribes with treaty fishing rights on the Columbia, is also developing its own plan to save wild salmon, while the Umatilla Tribe, one of the four, released its proposal independently.

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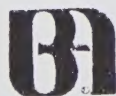
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NO SPRING CHINOOK: Is it all just a moot point?

The closure, which began in mid-February, affects both sport and commercial fishermen along the 140-mile stretch of the river from Bonneville Dam all the way to the Pacific for the first time in history.

This part of the Columbia once supported several thriving, lively fishing communities and dozens of salmon canneries.

Although historic, the announcement really took no one by surprise. "We were pretty much prepared for the restrictions," said Bob Eaton of Salmon for All. Faced with the low numbers, Eaton said, "the only reasonable and responsible thing to do is to say we'll bail out and let the dams take their fish."

It is common knowledge that somewhere in the neighborhood of two-thirds of the returning upriver salmon cannot survive the grueling trip past the eight hydroelectric dams on the river system, anyway, which has spurred some to call it all a moot point.

All on its own, the giant Grand Coulee, which has never had any fish passage capability, wiped out the entire run of upriver bright chinook, the famous "Royal Chinooks," in just a short time.

The Columbia River Fishermen's Union strongly pushed for some type of fish passage at Coulee, but then, as now, no one seemed to care, and this dam continues to be a major killer of a vast number of young salmon.

"There are plenty of people who just want to blame the harvesters so harvesting will go away, and they can keep their electric costs under control"

As a consolation prize, sports fishermen get to fish the Willamette River undisturbed year after year until late April or later, as is true this year, depending upon whether the 49,000 fish prediction takes shape.

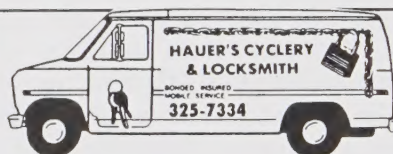
Gillnetters, however, probably won't be able to dip their nets in mainstem waters this year, even though they are actually *less of a threat to endangered upriver salmon than sports fishermen are, as sports are allowed to catch more.*

Last year, lower river gillnet fishermen caught just over 2,000 salmon during the

19-day season which ended March 10. Of these, only about 80 were thought to be upriver fish. Sports fishermen, meanwhile, caught twice as many Snake River fish (160) during their '94 season, and were allowed to fish well into April.

Martin says fishermen, especially gillnetters, are being unfairly targeted and blamed for the salmon's decline by interest groups wishing to further their own agenda. "There are plenty of people who just want to blame the harvesters so harvesting will go away, and they can keep their electric costs under control," he says.

So today, the eight problem-plagued dams in place on the Columbia River system remain huge killers of migrating salmon. The federal government's plan to help the salmon recover is a step in the right direction, but many fear it may be too little, too late.



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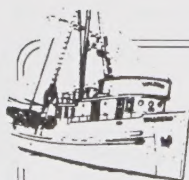
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A glimpse from the past

The old wooden double-ended troller Grace being towed the old-fashioned way... with horses. Note the unpaved street and the wooden trailer wheels. (Photo courtesy Compleat Photographer.)

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No separate season for sturgeon

Even though Oregon fishery managers approved it, there will be no separate commercial season for sturgeon this fall on the Lower Columbia.

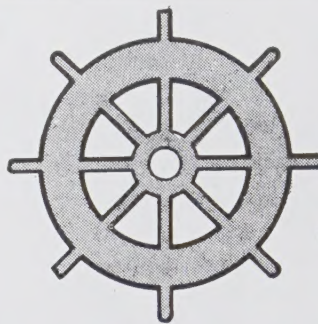
Gillnetters will, however, get to fish for sturgeon only if a season for salmon is opened as well.

In February, the Oregon fish commission voted to overturn a decision earlier this year in which it recommended a commercial sturgeon season on the lower river this fall, as sturgeon populations are quite healthy. (Biologists estimate more than one million are in the river below Bonneville Dam, yet Washington fishery officials always seem to lean toward the sport end of things.)

So, a compromise was finally reached between the two states, allowing a larger commercial catch (8-9,000 fish) but tossing out a sturgeon-only commercial season.

"It's the same old story," said one gillnet fisherman from Warrenton. "Washington sportsfishermen have the power to sway their decision-makers, and gillnetters get left out in the cold. They want all of them," he said.

Sports fishermen take the lion's share of harvested sturgeon year after year — thousands more than gillnetters — yet they get to sit on the beach and watch.

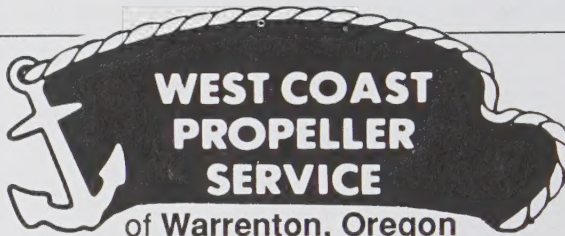


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